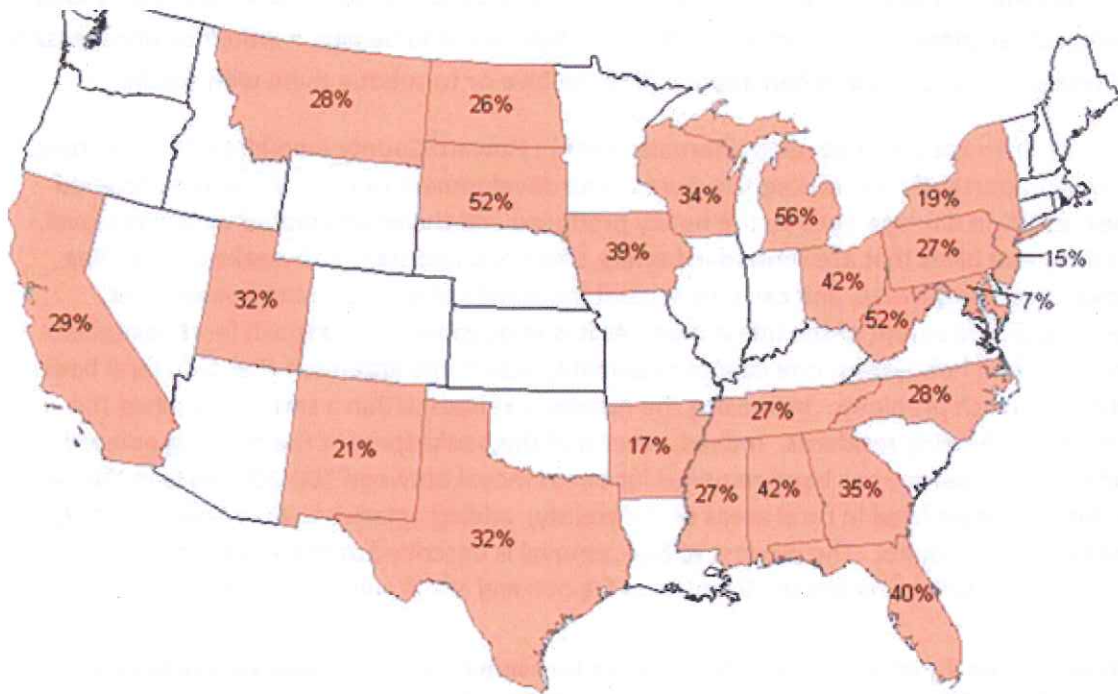


Testimony in Opposition to ZRA 117

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Let me state right up front that my concern is with keeping bees in high-density areas in New Town. We are not categorically against keeping bees on one's own property, but it must be within the zoning ordinances already in place. These are in place to reduce risk to individuals who occupy the surrounding properties. Increasing the numbers of bees within a small area increases the risks to the neighboring individuals. The two primary purposes for keeping bees are for pollination and the production of honey. The zoning within New Town is entirely residential; it is not zoned for farming or agricultural production.

Bees pollinate up to 25% of flowering plants in general and are necessary for the production of food (other insects, birds, animals and the wind pollinate the rest). According to the USDA Apiary Research Center, Maryland does not have a shortage of bees at this time (see map of colony loss by state, reproduced below from van Engelsdorp Hayes, Underwood and Pettis, 2009) and in fact, domestic honeybee production has increased by 45-50% in the past 50 years (Aizen, et al, Current Biology, 19:1-4, 2009).



Indeed, the need to set out sugar water for the bees speaks to the lack of sufficient flowering plants to maintain their production of nectar. In fact, bees are already visiting air conditioners in Clary's Forest to take advantage of the water runoff.

A single hive has been estimated to contain between 25,000 and 80,000 bees (with an average of 50,000 bees per hive) and can produce up to 50 pounds (4-5 gallons) of honey in any year. Five hives contain up to five times as many bees (250,000) and may produce up to 250 pounds of honey per year. This is the basis for a commercial enterprise, which may not be permitted under Columbia covenants but may be permitted in Howard County in rural or agricultural areas.

Overall, about 2% of the population is severely allergic to bees. Columbia has about 275,000 residents; you can expect that 2%, or between 5000-6000 of them are allergic to bees. Increasing the numbers of bees dramatically increases the risk of bee stings to these susceptible individuals. It is not reasonable to opine that bees only sting when attacked as people are often unaware of bees in grasses until they are stung. Nor can infants protect themselves from bees. Documentation (<http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/FreePubs/pdfs/agrs93.pdf>) shows that honeybees, like other animals, will attack if threatened, will release a chemical signal that attracts other bees and incites them to aggressive action if a single bee is crushed, or can attack if incited by loud sounds such as those that lawnmowers make. If bees were so benign, it would be unnecessary for beekeepers to "suit up" when approaching the hive or to subdue them with smoke.

Bees have been known to develop alternate hives in Howard County (and elsewhere) in trees, and more importantly, in housing structures. The development of hives in human-occupied homes results in damage both by the honey produced and the holes created by bee removal. The honey and hives that are formed in homes, smell bad and stain and weaken walls. Bee removal is very expensive, and can cost several thousands of dollars to the homeowner, depending on the extent of the infestation. As it is impossible to distinguish feral honeybees from purchased honeybees, one cannot reasonably accept the argument that only feral bees would cause such problems. Increasing the numbers of bees within a small area raises the risk to all surrounding residents. Indeed, several of the beekeepers at the meeting pointed out that their expertise has been required for bee removal between 100-200 times in the past year. Most of them lived in rural areas of the county; adding apiaries to New Town can only increase these incidents. The process of bee removal is described at these websites: <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/ent/notes/Urban/bees-faq.htm> and <http://pubs.cas.psu.edu/FreePubs/pdfs/agrs93.pdf>.

Additionally, from the latter source, **The beekeeper has control over the following and can be considered negligent if he/she fails to observe the exercise of an ordinary prudent person.**

1. **The owner of bees has entire control over where bee hives are located. *It is negligence to locate hives of bees where they may be expected to injure others. Bees located on a lot line is not a prudent location for bee hives. Or keeping a large number of bees on a small property. It is also negligent to handle bees at a time or in a manner that will cause the bees to injure others.***

2. *The owner of bees has entire control over bees being moved from one location to another. It is negligence to move bees without some protection to those along the route the bees will take to the next location. Some states require a bee net to cover a load of bees in transit. Bees should be secured to avoid accidental spills. Bees should not be moved during heavy traffic hours and in congested living areas. To avoid a charge of negligence, a beekeeper should close the entrances on the bee hives or cover the hives so loose bees would not escape from the hive.*
3. *The owner of bees has some control over the aggressiveness of his/her bees. It is negligence to know that you have aggressive bees. If it can be proved that you harbor aggressive bees you are failing to exercise the common practice of replacing these aggressive bee with gentle stock. Since the invasion of the Africanized honey bee, most states have enacted laws dealing with them (calling for their destruction).*

There are places where honeybees can be kept, particularly in rural areas, and current zoning stipulates that they must be at least 200 feet away from structures owned by others. It is not reasonable to put neighbors at risk by shortening this distance. It might even be impossible in some neighborhoods in New Town as many are irregularly shaped with houses that occupy most of the lot. Townhouse residents would not be protected by this zoning change either. Additionally, it is not reasonable to put the preferences of bees for a particular type of location above the very reasonable requests of human neighbors. At the very least, and to minimize risk, the board might consider prohibiting apiaries on lots of less than a half acre and might require that placement of apiaries be equidistant from the residence of the beekeeper and the residence of his closest neighbor. It was surprising that the petitioner whose violation initiated this request for a change in the regulation has areas within his own property borders that would comply with the current zoning regulation but refuses to use them. According to various beekeeping sources and the USDA Dept. of Agriculture's Bee Research Laboratory, hives may be moved several feet per day, and this can be done repeatedly to get the portable hives into an area that is compliant with the existing zoning regulations. Bees can be trained to go wherever you want them; they do not acquire an unwavering preference for a particular place as long as the hive entrance faces south and is about 3 feet above the ground. (If they did acquire such a preference, there would be no sales of hives at all.) Thus, I urge the Planning Board and the County Council to reject the petition for the zoning exception ZRA 117 as written.